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AUTHOR Elmore, Richard F.
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ABSTRACT

Research on the local implementation of national policies offering youth employment focused on "high-risk" youth in Seattle, San Francisco, and Clark County, Washington. Data from structured interviews with young people, front-line workers, and local administrators were analyzed using "backward mapping" (going from behavior to delivery-level practice and structure to policy). The picture of young people's entry into the labor market that emerged was characterized by a relatively high degree of movement between school and work, a relatively low degree of reliance on school as a means of entrance to the labor market, and a relatively high reliance on significant individuals rather than institutions or organizations. Front-line workers manifested an underlying tension between developmental and instrumental views of their jobs. Their work involved a high level of individual interaction with young people and coworkers in their own organizations but virtually no contact with people performing similar jobs in other organizations. They had a relatively informal work environment and perceived themselves as having limited control. Perceptions of policy and organization changed significantly as one moved from front-line workers to administrators in delivery organizations and to local government administrators of Federal employment programs. Two surprising research findings were organizational stability and the small effect of structure on delivery-level work. (YLB)

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National Policy and Local Delivery in Three U.S. Settings

Richard F. Elmore
Associate Professor
Graduate School of Public Affairs
University of Washington

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Youth Employment:

National Policy and Local Delivery in Three U.S. Settings

This paper summarizes research on the local implementation of national policies affecting youth employment in the United States. The research was conducted in three sites-- two medium-sized cities, Seattle and San Francisco, and one small metropolitan/rural area, Clark County, Washington-- during the 1981-82 school year.[1] It was designed to examine how national policy works at the delivery level. The study focused exclusively on "high-risk" youth, defined as those who, by virtue of family income, race, or language, have a higher-than-average likelihood of being out of school, unemployed, or both. Because of this focus, our interviews were conducted mainly in local programs that were funded under the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA), the federal government's major employment program for disadvantaged adults and youth, which has recently been superceded by the Joint Partnership Training Act (JTPA).[2] For reasons that will become clear in the body of the paper, the analysis goes beyond a simple description of how CETA youth programs were implemented to the question of how service delivery organizations and the adults who work in them affect young peoples' access to the labor market.

The mode of analysis is "backward mapping."[3] The logic of backward mapping begins by specifying the behavior that is the target of policy; it then examines the ways that various instruments of policy affect that behavior, either through organizations or by working directly on individuals; and finally, it examines how policy affects the structure of relations and the allocation of resources among key actors in the delivery system. Backward mapping focuses attention on how policies affect the choices of the

individuals to whom they are addressed, rather than on how policies are elaborated into formal regulatory and organizational structures. In this sense, backward mapping reverses the usual view of how policy is implemented. Instead of asking whether specific provisions of policies are being carried out consistent with the intent of policymakers, it asks whether we can expect policy to have its intended effect, given what we know about the individual and organizational behavior that policy is trying to influence.

The data and conclusions reported in this paper describe modal responses to structured interviews with young people, front-line workers, and local administrators in the three settings we analyzed. The analysis is meant to be suggestive of how one might analyze the implementation of public policy "from the ground up," taking into account problems of individual choice and street-level operations as well as broader strategic and political questions. Our sample does not permit generalization to the over-all effects of national policy on local delivery.

The paper is divided into three main sections, each following the logic of backward mapping, and concludes by addressing the policy consequences of the analysis. The first section deals with the perceptions, experiences, and behavior of high-risk youth toward school and work. The second deals with the perceptions, experiences, and behavior of front-line workers who deal on a daily basis with high-risk youth. And the third deals with the effects of policy on youth, front-line workers, and the organizations that implement policy.

1. School and Work Choices for High-Risk Youth

In aggregate terms, young peoples' behavior toward school and work in the United States can be characterized as follows: (1) A large proportion of teenagers and young adults are labor force participants; that is, they are

either employed or looking for work. Labor force participation among 16-17-years-olds rose from 46% in 1960 to over 51% in 1979; for 18-19-year olds, it rose from 69% to 72%; and for 20-24-year-olds, it remained in the neighborhood of 86%. Labor force participation has risen for teenage males and females in all population groups, except black males, where it has declined by roughly 25% between 1960 and 1979.[4] (2) Young people's labor force participation is relatively unresponsive to aggregate demand for labor, and unemployment among young people increases disproportionately with increases in adult unemployment.[5] Labor force participation among young people has not declined proportionately as overall unemployment rises. In fact, it has continued to increase steadily as unemployment has fluctuated over the past 20 years. This relationship suggests that young people are entering the labor force not just in response to excess demand for labor, but as an expression of their preference for work over other activities. The ratio of youth to adult unemployment over this period has fluctuated directly with increases and decreases in unemployment, between about 2.5 and 4.5. (3) A large proportion of teenagers and young adults pursue school and work at the same time. About 50% of young people aged 16-19 who were enrolled in school in 1979 were also labor market participants. This proportion has grown from about 35% in 1960.[6] (4) Labor force participation among teenagers and young adults is characterized by a high rate of movement among jobs. The rate of job turnover, the number of periods of unemployment, and the duration of unemployment are high for teenagers, but gradually decline and stabilize as young people reach their mid-twenties.[7] (5) Though high school completion is positively related to both earnings and employment, the proportion of high school drop-outs remains relatively high (in the neighborhood of 10% overall, as high as 40% in some urban areas) and low-income, minority youth are significantly more likely to drop out of high school.[8] In other words, higher

risk youth, defined in terms of income, ethnic group, and linguistic status, are more weakly attached to school.

We constructed a sample of 95 young people by choosing them at random from participants in local employment programs. They were all classified as low-income according to federal eligibility criteria, most were members of minority groups, and a about one-quarter either did not speak English at all or used English as their second language. In the two cities we studied, Seattle and San Francisco, about one-quarter of our sample was composed of youth who were participants in "out-of-school" programs; that is, they had dropped out of high school at some point and were now attempting to finish a high-school-equivalency program as well as to enter the labor market. In our sample of in-school youth, a small proportion (less than 10%) had been out of school for more than one month at some point in their high school education. Those enrolled in in-school programs tended to be younger (most in the 17-18 year interval) than those enrolled in out-of-school programs (most in 19-20 year interval). All were either employed at the time we interviewed them, as a result of their participation in an employment program, or were preparing to enter the labor market. Our sample was constrained by the selection processes of the programs we studied, so it can't be characterized as representative of the youth population as a whole or of high-risk youth in particular. It does provide a fair representation of the kind of young people who are likely to find their way into local programs designed to help high risk youth enter the labor market.

The attitudes and behavior of young people in our sample toward school and work were similar to those of the youth population at large. They were active participants in the labor market; they did not see school and work as mutually exclusive choices; and they saw themselves as continuing to work,

regardless of their future educational plans.

Beyond these broad patterns of similarity between our sample and the youth population at large, a number of more specific patterns emerged. First, while they attached a high value to education, they did not perceive adults in school as playing a large role in their entry to the labor force. Asked to respond to the statements "how well you do in school makes a big difference in how well you do in later life" and "how well you do in school depends on how hard you try," all but a handful agreed. Likewise, about two-thirds said they planned to pursue some form of post-secondary education, vocational or academic, after completing high school. This response should be viewed with caution, however. It sometimes appeared that young people assumed it was the appropriate answer to give, and at other times that they had not gauged their present skills or past performance against their aspirations. When they were asked to respond to the statement "most adults I have known in school care whether I succeed or fail" about half agreed and half disagreed, and when they were asked to identify adults who had been helpful to them, most cited family members or adults they had met through employment programs, rather than teachers, counselors, coaches, or administrators they had met in school.

Second, school did not seem to have played a strong role in shaping their preferences for work, except in a negative sense. More than half said that they had taken vocational or career education courses in school. These were predominantly clerical (typing, business machines) or shop (metal or wood) courses, and in only a few isolated cases did the courses correspond to what young people said they were currently doing in the labor market or what they said they would like to do. A common theme in our interviews was that young people found work satisfying because "I'm taken seriously and made to feel important," "it keeps you busy," "you learn how to be independent," or "you learn how to get along with people." These comments reflected a relatively

strong preference for work over school and they also showed that, for many young people, the social aspects of work took precendence over more tangible benefits such as making money or gaining experience and status.

Third, the young people in our sample were positive, if somewhat episodic participants, in the labor market. The majority had been employed two-to-three times, most jobs lasting six months or less. Most had plans to continue working as long they could find jobs. Virtually all agreed with the statement, "my work will be an important part of my life." Likewise, more than two-thirds said that their two closest friends were working and liked to work. When asked to respond to the statement "most people I know like to work," however, they were about evenly divided between agreement and disagreement, which suggests that they did not perceive other people to be as positively disposed to work as they and their friends. Many young people drew a distinction between adults and other young people in their responses, saying that while most of their friends like to work, their parents and other adults they knew did not.

Fourth, most of the young people in our sample identified certain key adults as being the critical factor in guiding their entry to the labor market, rather than institutions or organized processes. In the majority of cases, the adults young people identified as being helpful worked in CETA-funded employment programs, which was not surprising given that this was where we did our interviewing, but in a significant number of cases they were relatives (brothers, sisters, uncles, parents). In only a handful of cases did young people say that they got their jobs by themselves without any help. This finding does not mean that institutions and organized processes were unimportant in guiding young peoples' entry to the labor market. Rather, it means that young people, when asked to describe how they got their jobs,

identified certain key adults, rather than the organizations or processes of which these adults were a part. This pattern did not hold, however, when we asked young people to identify what they would do if they had to find a job tomorrow. Their responses to this question tended predominantly to take the form of standard processes and institutions-- classified ads, personnel offices, employment services, etc. In a small number of cases they cited individual adults who had already been helpful. The tentative picture that emerges from these responses, then, is that young people see specific adults as having been crucial in helping them get where they are, but they haven't yet projected that view into the future.

The picture of young peoples' entry to the labor market that emerges from this profile is one characterized, first, by a relatively high degree of movement between school and work; second, by a relatively low degree of reliance on school as a means of entry to the labor market; and third, by a relatively heavy reliance on significant individuals rather than institutions or organizations. Movement from school to work appears not to be an orderly, step-wise progression; it appears instead to be a process of short-term engagement and disengagement, of search through familiar adults, and of decisions made on the basis of immediate opportunities, rather than long-term objectives. Individuals-- especially key adults-- play a significant role in this world, by helping young people negotiate entry to adult institutions. But organizations, especially schools, don't seem to play a decisive role, at least in the eyes of young people.

Both the aggregate evidence and our limited sample of interviews suggest that the term "school-to-work transition," which is so often used to characterize the youth employment problem,[9] does not give a very accurate picture of how young people make school and work decisions. To be sure, there is a "transition" from school to work, if only in an aggregate statistical

sense; as people get older, they spend less time in school and more time in the labor force. But as a characterization of how young people make decisions, there are at least three potential problems with the notion of a school-to-work transition. First, it probably overstates the importance of schools, as organizations, in positively shaping the decisions of young people, especially those we have characterized as high risk. Second, it implies a gradual, step-wise movement from school to work, when the actual pattern appears to be a more episodic and disconnected. And third, it suggests that school, as an institution, is the major force creating movement into the labor force, when in fact this movement seems to be influenced much more by specific attachments that young people form with adults, more often outside school than inside. Both the aggregate data and our interviews suggest that the school-and-work behavior is better described as a process of idiosynchratic, trial-and-error search that is anchored by adult contacts young people have made through work and various intermediary institutions-- employment programs, family, etc. It is probably not a sequential, organized, developmental process. This conclusion tracks closely with the views of adults who work with young people, as we shall see.

If true, this view helps to explain some of the peculiarities of demand for organized services designed to help young people enter the labor market that we discovered in the process of our study. Our interviews were conducted during a period of growing unemployment and declining federal funding for youth employment programs. We found several instances of dramatic instability in demand for youth employment services. In Seattle, for example, the program for in-school youth changed, between June and September of 1981, from a predominantly black program into one predominantly populated by asian refugees. Front-line workers were unable to explain this dramatic shift at

the time it was occurring; they simply accepted it, and enrolled large numbers of Asian refugees, despite the fact that many did not yet speak English well enough to take jobs with English-speaking employers. Only well after the fact did we discover that the shift in demand was probably attributable to the fact that newly arrived refugees had formed strong networks of peers and adult "sponsors"-- American families, church groups, neighborhood associations-- who played a significant role in negotiating their entry to Seattle. The black youth, who had previously accounted for the majority of participants in the program had essentially "disappeared." Front-line workers speculated that "they probably found jobs on their own" or that "they might be involved in after-school athletics," but were unable to offer more specific explanations. What probably happened is that they had been bumped from the program because of the eagerness and initiative of the Asian refugee youth, who had moved from the summer program and filled the available positions in the program. Black youth had, over time, come to expect that there would be subsidized jobs waiting for them at the beginning of school. The Asian students, on the other hand, had received encouragement from their peers and from adults to seek the benefits of the work programs.

Another example of erratic demand comes from two out-of-school programs in San Francisco, one serving a predominantly Black population, the other a predominantly Hispanic population. In both instances, despite increasing unemployment, demand for positions in the program had fallen below the number of participants the programs were authorized to serve. In one program demand had fallen by about 50%; in the other, it had fallen by about 25%. Front-line workers were unable to give specific explanations for the shift in demand. One possibility they suggested was that publicity surrounding federally-funded employment programs had given potential clients the impression that the programs were being disbanded. Another explanation was "word is out on the

streets that there aren't any jobs, period, regardless of whether you're enrolled in a program." Both explanations suggest that young people arrive at their decisions to enter programs based on networks of advice, rather than by utilizing formal points of access.

Whatever the explanation for instability of demand, access to employment programs for high-risk youth is clearly not a simple matter of setting eligibility criteria and admitting students. Demand is heavily influenced by factors outside the control of those who deliver the services-- the level of employment in local labor markets, informal networks among young people, and knowledge of programs among adults who take an interest in high-risk youth. The one potentially influential factor that lies within that control of service deliverers is individual contacts with youth. Local employment and training organizations do not use standardized mechanisms for finding and enrolling clients. They do not, for example, use the records of schools or social service agencies to identify potential clients and solicit their participation, as is done in European countries.[10] Nor is it likely, as we shall see later, that such mechanisms would work if they existed. Those mechanisms that have the highest likelihood of working are ones based on a interactions between individual adults and individual young people.

2. Patterns of Interaction Between Young People and Adults

The actual work that adults do to influence the labor market participation of high risk youth is a product of two main factors: policies communicated from outside the organizations in which adults work and practices agreed upon within the organization. This section deals primarily with practice. We attempted to understand the work of delivery-level personnel, first, in terms of their own descriptions of practice, and second, in terms of the influences that organization and policy exercise on practice. In doing

the influences that organization and policy exercise on practice. In doing so, we asked adults working directly with high-risk youth to describe what they did, what the purposes of their work were, what differences and similarities they observed among the young people they worked with, and what the most significant problems were that their clients faced. We also asked a number of questions designed to elicit how their work was influenced by the organizations they worked in-- for example, how their caseloads were determined, how much discretion they had in making decisions about their clients, what proportion of their time they spent working with young people individually and in groups, how often and in what context they met with other adults doing the same kind of work as they, and how their work was supervised and evaluated.

There are a limited number of services one can offer to influence the labor market participation of young people. One is to provide direct employment, which can involve either subsidizing employers for hiring young people or recruiting employers without the aid of a subsidy. Another is to provide information on alternative career possibilities, assistance in searching for jobs, and assistance in making choices. Another is to provide training designed to prepare clients for specific jobs. Still another is to provide remedial education for students who lack some specific skill or credential-- English-language instruction or a high school completion certificate, for example-- that could influence their employability. In the language of those who work on youth employment these activities are called, respectively, work experience, counseling and career development, job training, and remedial education. They take place separately or in various combinations in a variety of different types of organizations financed in whole or in part by grants from the federal government.

There are no standard roles or job descriptions for youth employment

specialists, unlike school systems, for example, where the terms "teacher" and "counselor" have relatively uniform meanings from one setting to another, or social service systems, where "case worker" or "eligibility worker" have come to mean similar things. Still, the work of youth employment specialists involves a cluster of relatively well-defined tasks that recur consistently from one setting to another. One task might be called counseling or advising. It involves one-on-one advice about job-related matters, such as career choice and on-the-job behavior, and personal matters. A second task might be called job development. It involves recruiting and maintaining relations with employers of young people involved in work experience. A final task might be called simply teaching. It involves actual group instruction in such areas as basic skills (reading, math, grammar), English language, occupational skills, and knowledge of the job market. Often these tasks are all performed by the same person. The in-school program in Seattle, for example, was designed around employment counselors who were paid from federal employment funds and were part of a separate organization within the school system, but were physically located in the city's high schools. These workers did counseling and job development primarily, with a small amount of teaching on career-related subjects. In other organizations, however, the tasks were differentiated. One community-based organization in a Hispanic neighborhood of San Francisco, for example, had separate roles for job development and teaching; counseling was assumed by all staffmembers.

The 60 front-line workers in our sample reported that they spent the largest share of their time (between 40% and 60%) working directly with young people; of that portion, they spent the majority working with individuals, and the smallest share working with groups. They viewed their work, in other words, as predominantly composed of one-on-one relationships with clients.

Beneath this basic pattern of adult-youth interaction, however, lay large variations in caseloads. In our three sites, we found caseloads as low as five youth to one adult and as high as 140 youth to one adult (the caseload in the latter program had been over 400-to-1 in the previous year). The school-based programs, with the exception of the rural schools in Clark County, had much high case loads than the programs based in other governmental agencies or community based organizations. At the high end of the distribution there was less one-to-one interaction and more time spent on routine paperwork, group instruction, and dispensing paychecks for subsidized work. The modal caseload in our sample, though, was 15-25 youth, but the school-based programs were 60 and 140 in Seattle and San Francisco. The typical pattern of work for an individual consisted of (1) a large number of one-on-one contacts with young people, on a daily or weekly basis, depending on whether the program involved short cycles of three-to-four weeks or whether it extended over the whole school year, (2) a limited number of group contacts, which usually involved teaching or group discussions, (3) a regular schedule of visits to employers and young people at worksites, and (4) periodic recruitment of employers to take students for work experience. In some instances, as noted above, these tasks were done separately by different people, but even in those cases there was a high degree of interaction among workers, so the organizations did not appear to be highly differentiated. Two features of this combination of tasks are especially noteworthy. One is the heavy emphasis on one-to-one contacts between adults and youth, which contrasts dramatically with what most young people experience in high school, where contacts tend to be between one adult and relatively large groups of students. The other important feature is the role that delivery-level workers play in negotiating entry to the workplace and in negotiating the boundary between school and work. Having adults develop initial job contacts and periodically visit employers at the work site

gives the young people a kind of legitimacy with the employer that they would not otherwise have.

The duration of programs varied considerably. Most programs for in-school youth ran over the entire school year, although there was significant turnover in the course of a year as young people left the program for other jobs or simply lost interest. The in-school programs typically involved four hours of work experience per day, sometimes coupled with academic credit, plus individual counseling and periodic group workshops in career development. Before 1981-82, the year in which our interviewing took place, the typical in-school program involved full payment of students' wages from federal funds. Because these payments constituted a subsidy to employers, federal regulations restricted them to non-profit and governmental organizations, precluding placement of students with private firms. During the year of our interviews, a number of programs we studied were in the process of converting some or all of their work experience programs to unsubsidized, private sector jobs. This change was in response to reductions in federal funding. Programs for out-of-school youth were usually shorter in duration than those for in-school and more highly focused. Some were individualized, in the sense that students entered the program to pass the high school equivalency exam and find a job, and left the program when these tasks were completed. Other programs had finite time periods attached to them, often as little as three-to-four weeks or as much as a full school year.

Two major themes emerged when we asked front-line workers to describe their work and its purposes. One might be called the "developmental" view. This view emphasized the role that adults played in helping young people to develop the positive self-image, personal attributes, and cognitive skills that precede entry into the labor force. Another view might be called

"instrumental." This view emphasized the role that adults played in helping youth to get jobs and deemphasized changing the attributes or skills of young people. A typical statement of the developmental view was, "I work with kids who don't have the advantage of a stong home background and try to help them develop a good image of themselves and the confidence to sell themselves to an employer." A typical statement of the instrumental view was, "I help kids find jobs; beyond that, they're responsible for themselves." The dominant view among the front-line workers we interviewed was the developmental view. Most workers saw themselves as being closely involved in the personal lives of the young people they worked with, whether they wanted to be or not, and as helping young people to develop certain skills and attributes. The more closely they became involved in the lives of their clients, the more front-line workers perceived their clients' problems to extend beyond work. Many front-line workers saw themselves as compensating for the failure of other adults-- in families, communities, and schools-- to form strong attachments with their clients. While the developmental and instrumental views seem logically contradictory-- the one stressing close interpersonal relations, the other detachment-- they were often held by the same person. Often, front-line workers would begin by describing their work and its purposes in terms of helping young people to develop and end by describing how difficult it was to have an effect and how the pressures of their work led them to view placing young people in jobs as their primary activity.

This ambivalence between the developmental and instrumental views reflects a basic tension in the work of youth employment specialists. On the one hand, they see the young people they work with as demanding strong adult attachments and as needing help with a broad range of problems, from immediate income to personal relationships to educational deficits to interpersonal skills. On the other hand, they see themselves as having limited access to

young people for a relatively short duration and as having, in the final analysis, only one material benefit to confer on their clients-- a job. A common resolution of this tension is to try to form strong attachments with young people in the early stages, in order to get the basic developmental tasks done, and then to attenuate those attachments as young people reach the end of their time in the program. A common refrain among front-line workers was typified by one out-of-school program counselor who said, "it's important to love these kids ruthlessly, to get behind their defenses and to stay with them until they take charge of their own lives; then it's important to gradually pull away." This view was corroborated as well by a number of young people, who would typically say, "the important difference between this program and high school is that here they stay after you until you get the stuff. You get the idea that they really care. They want to you make it in the outside world."

The front-line workers in our sample were typically young (in their middle-to-late twenties), relatively mobile (two or three previous jobs), committed to work with youth (at least one prior job involving work with young people), and college-educated (about equally divided between general liberal arts degrees and specific degrees in teaching or counseling). The exceptions to these general attributes were a significant number of people in their forties and fifties who had left conventional teaching jobs and a few younger people who were products of programs like the ones they were working in. At the time of our interviews, federal youth employment programs were undergoing large funding reductions, and a significant proportion of the people we interviewed (one-quarter to one-third) were contemplating or actively involved in changing careers. They saw themselves as being involved in high-stress, low-pay jobs, for which society at large had little appreciation.

Most front-line workers viewed their immediate work environment as informal and unbureaucratic, and saw themselves as have a relatively wide range of discretion in the use of their skills. Virtually all front-line workers met frequently and regularly, individually and in groups, with their counterparts and supervisors within the organization. In only a few instances did we find formal, bureaucratic relations between front-line workers and their supervisors; these tended to occur where employment programs had been attached to school systems and were administered by career schoolpeople. In most instances, front-line workers said they had daily, or at least weekly, contact with their immediate supervisors, and these contacts were informal. Only about half said that their work was formally evaluated by a supervisor, but most reported receiving some kind of feedback about how well they were doing their jobs. When they were asked to whom they would take a major complaint about some administrative matter within the organization, virtually all answered that they thought such complaints could be resolved by their immediate supervisor. In one program-- King County, surrounding Seattle-- workers organized themselves into a cooperative structure, in which most decisions were made collectively in formal meetings among front-line workers and administrators that often occurred more than once a week. Most participants in this form of collective decisionmaking found it suited their expectations of how their work should be organized; a few found the constant meetings to be burdensome and an interference in their work with young people. Another program-- within the Seattle school system-- was more hierarchically structured and differentiated, but still maintained a high degree of collective decisionmaking; all important decisions affecting staffmembers were discussed in staff meetings. The typical pattern of work, in all but one or two programs, was informal, collegial, and highly decentralized.

While front-line workers had a high level of interaction with others in

their own organizations, they had virtually no contact with people at the same level of other organizations doing related work. This pattern manifested itself in serveral ways. First, front-line workers in community organizations did not consult, even infrequently, with other workers in similar organizations. Second, front-line workers in programs administered within school systems had some contact with regular high school counselors, teachers of either academic or vocational subjects, or high school administrators, but they saw themselves as largely isolated from the regular school program and from each other when they worked in different schools. The isolation was often a matter of choice. Contacts between youth employment specialists and school people, when they occurred, were often formal and included resolving problems with individual students, such as class schedules, permission to leave school for part of the day, access to special courses, disputes over academic credit, etc. And third, front-line workers, whether they worked within schools or outside schools, in community organizations, were often critical of schools and school people for the way they treated their clients. The major crticisms levelled at the school system by youth employment specialists were (1) that young people were not kept busy and productive in school, hence they tended to see school as a waste of time; (2) that teachers and counselors did not take individual students and their problems seriously, hence forcing students to look outside school for adult attachments; (3) schools were not teaching basic skills to the hard-to-teach, hence leaving large numbers of students unprepared for either vocational training or employment; and (4) schools were not interested or actively engaged in understanding the labor market in which they were located. Whether these criticisms were accurate or not, they expressed a strong division between the federally-funded youth employment system and local school systems at the

delivery level.

These delivery-level divisions grew partly out of policy, partly out of the preferences of front-line workers, and partly out of administrative structure. Policy provided strong incentives to define one's interests in terms of employment for high-risk young people, vocational education, or counseling, rather than in terms of the whole population of young people who might benefit from all services. The administrative structure aggravated these distinctions by assigning separate tasks to separate central administrators. And the preferences of front-line workers reinforced policy and administrative structure by focusing attention inward rather than across organizational boundaries.

Front-line workers did not see themselves as controlling access to their programs or as exercising the determining influence on their clients' careers. With few exceptions, decisions about who would participate were made by centralized "intake units" that were structurally separate from the service delivery part of the organization. In only one small organization did we find that final selection decisions were made collegially by the entire staff. Caseloads were likewise determined by dividing the number of positions authorized for the program under its funding agreement by the number of front-line workers and assigning clients on a more or less random basis. In addition, front-line workers saw themselves as having a very limited amount of time with their clients, relative to the time these young people spent on the street, at work, or in school, hence, exercising relatively little leverage on their aspirations and behavior.

One result of this limited control was a highly focused view of what they wanted to achieve with clients. Most delivery-level workers saw themselves as imparting a limited number of specific skills and attributes that would serve their clients well in the labor market. If the objective was

to prepare the client to pass the high school equivalency examination (the Test of General Educational Development, or GED), as was the case in all the out-of-school programs we studied, the subject matter areas of the test would be broken into discrete pieces and short-term prep courses would be offered in each area. If the objective was to supplement work experience with general knowledge of career options, as was the case in nearly all the in-school programs we studied, then a single workshop or a short series would be organized around a specific topics of career choice. If the objective was to prepare young people to search for jobs on their own, an element of many programs, then delivery-level workers would lead young people through a structured exercise in preparing a resume, getting an interview, going to the interview, and following up on initial contacts. What seemed to distinguish these activities, in the minds of both clients and front-line workers, was their specificity and their immediate pay-off. It was these attributes that were most often mentioned favorably as the things that distinguished what employment programs did differently from the school system.

Another consequence of limited control was the ability of front-line workers to focus on one or two attributes or skills of a given individual client at a time and, temporarily at least, to disregard others that might appear striking to other adults. Workers in out-of-school programs, for example, did not routinely hassle their clients about their dress, language, or behavior around their peers while they were teaching basic skills. Work on dress and behavior would come at the point where clients were ready to begin approaching employers, when it was clear what its utility would be. Workers in in-school programs, for example, would often stress maintaining acceptable performance in school and punctuality at work, and leave questions of dress and demeanor to the client and the employer. This focusing behavior seemed to

result in working relationships between young people and adults that both viewed as favorable and helpful. Young people frequently observed that they were treated more as adults by the people the came in contact with through employment programs than by the people they came in contact with in the regulat school program.

A final consequence of limited control was that front-line workers saw the outcomes of their work differently from higher-level administrators. As we will see in the following section, all the organizations we studied were under considerable pressure to produce measurable results. The most obvious measure of success for an employment program is, of course, placing a client in a full-time, unsubsidized job, although for the youth population progression to higher-level skill training or even to post-secondary education is often viewed as a favorable outcome. The view of what constituted a satisfactory result was considerably more complex and less determinant for front-line workers. In some instances, they argued that the more serious the problems presented by their clients the less likely they were to have a clear impact. One worker in an out-of-school program, for instance, said, "when a 17-year-old kid comes in here with a second grade reading score, what's a satisfactory result? I would settle for sending him out of here, after three months, with an eighth grade reading score and entry to a solid vocational skills program, but I don't think that necessarily counts as a good result outside the organization." Another worker in an in-school program said, "a lot of these kids need money to buy things that other kids take for granted. If we make it possible for them to have some things that other kids have and to make contacts that might pay off later in the job market, can you ask for much more?" Front-line workers, in other words, were much more likely to focus on proximate results-- things they saw as feasible to achieve, taking into account their clients' backgrounds and the workers' limited leverage-- rather

than longer-term, more abstract results.

A final consequence of limited control was that front-line workers placed a considerable emphasis on motivation, in addition to cognitive skills and family background, when they were asked to describe the attributes that distinguished clients. Given their limited ability to influence young people, they saw young peoples' willingness to push themselves as a key factor in their own success as well as their clients'. Many said they would rather work with a highly motivated, unskilled client than with a weakly motivated, but relatively skilled client. "If you show an extreme interest in working and going to school," said one worker of her pitch to clients, "then we can help you. If you don't, nobody can." Some front-line workers thought it was possible to build motivation through strong contacts between youth and adults, but as funding for employment programs declined and as emphasis on performance standards increased, most front-line workers said that programs were increasingly having to select on their perception of motivation. In terms of the earlier distinction between views of practice, many front-line workers saw themselves as being pushed by external circumstances from a developmental view of their work to an instrumental one-- an occurence that many viewed with alarm.

The world of front-line workers in youth employment organizations, then, is characterized by the following attributes: (1) adults working directly with young people are relatively young and have a demonstrable commitment to their clientele, judged in terms of their prior experience; (2) they manifest an underlying tension between developmental and instrumental views of their jobs; (3) their work involves a high level of individual interaction with young people and co-workers in their own organizations; (4) they have virtually no contact with people performing similar jobs in other

organizations; (5) they have a relatively informal work environment in which supervision and evaluation typically take place collectively or collegially; (6) they perceive themselves as having limited control over both who comes into the program and what happens to clients after they leave; and (6) they tend to focus on a limited number of skills and attributes that they think can influence in a short period of time.

3. The Multiple Meanings of Policy and Organization

When we asked front-line workers what rules, procedures, or policies made their jobs easier, or more difficult, they generally found the questions hard to answer. When they did reply, they tended to focus on paperwork requirements (weekly reports on clients, payroll forms, reports on the disposition of clients leaving the program, etc.) or on eligibility requirements (income criteria). Policy, in other words, had very a specific meaning for front-line workers. It set limits on their work. It was not perceived as a grant of authority to engage in official action. It was instead seen as a set of constraints on practice. Most front-line workers readily expressed their judgements about what the young people they worked with needed. They did not see policy as playing a particularly important role in making it possible for them to do what was necessary. They saw policy instead as a necessary, if often annoying, set of limits that one had to accept in order to do what was necessary.

Nor did front-line workers see their work as being part of a national effort made possible by the existence of national policy. They did not see themselves as "implementing" national policy objectives; they often did see themselves as protecting their interests and their clients' interests against an increasingly hostile public and an increasingly unsympathetic agency bureaucracy.

Yet beneath this largely negative view of policy lay a surprising willingness to adapt to changes in objectives that were communicated from above. During the time of our interviews, a number of significant shifts in policy were occurring at the national and local levels. Prime sponsors, the local administrative agencies for federal employment policy, were under pressure from the U.S. Department of Labor to produce clearer evidence of program effects and provide better records of their grants to delivery organizations. This pressure resulted in nearly universal adoption of "management information systems" that provided a central record of individual clients' progress, proportions of funding for different types of activities, and the performance of program operators. At roughly the same time, declining federal funding resulted in difficult expenditure decisions at the local level; expenditure reductions were based in part on performance criteria. These shifts had a significant impact on the nature of work in youth employment organizations and on the way front-line workers perceived their work. A number of organizations responded by reducing or eliminating stipends for participation in educational programs, by moving substantial numbers of young people from subsidized to unsubsidized jobs, by shortening the duration of educational and career orientation programs, and by focusing more resources on job development and placement. A large proportion of the front-line workers we interviewed said, usually with qualified approval, that youth employment programs had shifted substantially in emphasis, from "income support" to "job placement" objectives. Many said that youth employment programs had gone too far in the direction of paying low-income youth for activities that had little to do with work and holding them in educational programs for long periods of time without encouraging them to seek unsubsidized employment. They saw the shift in emphasis as having given youth employment programs a new sense of direction, to which they gave their overall

approval, even though they doubted that the new emphasis would work for the most difficult cases.

Perceptions of policy changed significantly as one moved from front-line workers to administrators in delivery organizations and to local government administrators of federal employment programs. At this level, people clearly distinguished between policies initiated at the federal level and those initiated at the local level, they clearly placed themselves in both the historical development of policy and the current delivery system, and they were accutely aware of (if often frustrated by) the movement of policy at the federal and local level. Furthermore, the administrators we interviewed at the local level were accutely aware of being part of a local political system in which important decisions were made about the allocation of resources among competing organizations and activities.

Like policy, organization meant different things at different levels of the delivery system. For both front-line workers and delivery-level administrators, organization meant <u>their</u> immediate organization, not the organization of the local delivery system. Their relations with their counterparts in other organizations were either non-existent or highly politicized. As noted earlier, there was little or no interaction among delivery-level workers in different organizations working on similar problems or populations. There was a higher level of interaction among administrators of delivery-level organizations, but this interaction took the form largely of representing the organization in local decisions. For example, in San Francisco, the local government administrative unit responsible for employment, the Mayor's Office of Employment and Training (MOET), gave considerable weight to the funding recommendations of its Employment and Training Committee, which was composed partly of representatives of the

various delivery organizations. This was the main setting in which administrators of the various delivery organizations met face-to-face, and it was seen as an important political arena. In Clark County, there was a high level of consultation on administrative questions between county-level officials and representative of delivery-level organization, but since funding decisions were not included in these discussions, participants did not perceive them as political. In Seattle, decisions cutting across delivery organizations were made largely by the staff of the local government administrative agencies, so there was little interaction among administrators even on a political level.

Taken together, these views of policy and organization among front-line workers and local administrators reinforced a highly balkanized delivery system for youth employment at the local level. Front-line workers saw themselves working with <u>their</u> clients, in <u>their</u> organizations; higher-level policy decisions were constraints on their actions, not grants of authority to do things that would otherwise be impossible. Delivery-level administrators likewise saw the interests of their programs and their organizations as paramount; for them, higher-level policy decisions were important mainly for the effect they had on the allocation of resources among competing organizations, among competing programs within organizations, and sometimes among competing neighborhoods or ethnic groups. Local administrators of federal employment programs saw themselves as orchestrating the competing demands of delivery organizations, within constraints imposed by federal law and regulations. The result, in all three of our settings, was a structure in which separate organizations were doing separate things for separate populations, all within a given geographical area, but no one was espcially concerned about the overall effects.

This delivery structure, or lack of structure, is partly a result of the

incentives built into federal policy, partly a result of the peculiarities of local government organization in the U.S., and partly a result of adaptations to the school-and-work behavior of young people. Federal policy promotes a balkanized delivery structure by encouraging localities to create separate organizations for the administration of federally-funded employment and training activities rather than relying on existing structures. Funding formulas at all levels of government promote balkanization because they allocate money based on "body counts" of students served by specific organizations, rather than on the basis of how well the total array of institutions is serving the total population. Local government organization promotes balkanization because school systems, community colleges, and general government at the local level are organized independently of one another, each with its own separate base of authority. The high rate of movement of young people between school and work promotes a balkanized delivery system because there is no single set of local institutions one can rely on to keep track of where young people are at any given time.

Even though this balkanized system represents a relatively successful adaptation to the basic forces shaping the implementation of federal youth employment policy, it creates its own special set of problems. The most obvious one is equity of access. The absence of any strong incentives for lateral coordination at the local level means that no one can assure that high-risk young people who need assistance negotiating entry to the labor market are actually getting it. Indeed, no one can say reliably how large the population of high-risk youth is in a given setting, or what proportion of that population is actually being served. Another serious problem is that the system promotes narrowly-focused recruitment and job placement, often at the expense of attention to larger structural issues. The most difficult problems

of high-risk youth have to do with their relative lack of preparation, by basic education, training, or experience, for mainstream jobs. The incentives embedded in federal policy encourage delivery organizations to recruit and place high-risk youth in jobs that are immediately available and for which they are either immediately qualified and can be trained to do in a relatively short period of time, without much regard for the changing structure of local labor markets. Delivery-level organizations adapt to these incentives by developing networks of contacts with youth and employers which they rely on over time to produce the outcomes that federal and local administrators expect. However, the economic base on which these jobs rest is frequently eroding. In Seattle and San Francisco, for example, the economies were becoming increasingly professionalized and service-oriented, and less hospitable to youth with basic high school or vocational training. In Clark County, the economy was shifting from one heavily reliant on forest product manufacturing to service and technical industry. This combination of policy incentives and economic shifts can produce increasing competition among delivery-level organizations for a declining pool of jobs.

Two findings in our research on local delivery systems were somewhat surprising. The first was the age of the delivery organizations in our sample. Most could trace their histories continuously back 15-20 years. The in-school program in Seattle, for example, had been in continuous operation under various names and auspices since the Neighborhood Youth Corps was established by the U.S. Congress in 1964. The community organizations in our San Francisco sample could trace their roots back 13, 18, 21, and 25 years, through various locally- and federally-financed programs. Despite this history, the typical front-line worker was relatively young and had relatively little experience with the organization. So the picture that emerges from our sample is one of very stable organizations, with highly mobile populations of

workers and clients. The continuity of the organizations is expressed in their identification with the communities in which they work and in a few key leaders who stay with the organization for long periods of time. Within this continuity, there is a high level of turn-over at the staff level. These organizations are effectively the "capital stock" of federal youth employment policy. They continue to exist over time by responding to shifts in federal objectives and by turning over large numbers of staff and clients. Yet there is no explicit acknowledgement in federal policy of the role these organizations perform. Federal law and regulation speaks to the relationship between the federal government and designated agencies of state and local government, not to the role that delivery-level organizations within state and local jurisdictions. There is a major risk in failing to understand that delivery-level organizations play a key, continuous role in implementing federal policy. The risk is that federal policy will be changed in ways that threaten the existence of the capital stock of delivery organizations, without understanding that it is they who actually deliver the most of the services, not units of local government.

The second surprising finding in our analysis of local delivery systems was that structure seemed to have little effect on delivery-level work. We deliberately chose our three sites to reflect the major structural variations in local administration of federal employment policy. Seattle is a system based largely on programs nested within other local government agencies; the school system, the city's Department of Human Resources, and the county's human services agency run the major youth employment programs. Clark County is a system in which the county government exercises the dominant influence in service delivery over a partly-rural, partly-metropolitan area, much like the "county unit" system in the South. San Francisco is a system based primarily

on ethnic community organizations, like many large U.S. cities. What we found was that, while these structural variations were very well adapted to their local settings, they didn't produce any significant variation in either program content or delivery-level practice from setting to setting. Our interviews with delivery-level personnel and administrators produced basically the same descriptions of work in all three settings.

Two explanations come to mind. First, there are only a limited number of things one can do to help high-risk youth negotiate entry to the labor force. After twenty years, or more, of local experience, it is highly unlikely that dramatic new variations will arise. So what we were observing was probably stable set of delivery-level patterns that had emerged after a long period of trial-and-error. Second, much of this trial-and-error learning has been institutionalized and codified in federal policy and local administration. Program guidelines, funding priorities and criteria, performance standards, and the like, all reflect the basic patterns of practice: counseling, teaching, and employer relations.

4. Conclusions

Our basic findings on the relationship between national policy and local delivery in youth employment can be summarized in three conclusions:

>>Patterns of young peoples' movement between work and school suggest that the delivery structure most compatible with the actual behavior of youth is one that (a) relies on a number of different points of entry; (b) does not rely exclusively on schools as its main source of contact with young people; (c) promotes a high level of one-on-one contact between youth and adults; and (d) permits a high degree of flexibility in matching services to young people.

>>Both delivery-level practice and organizational structure have adapted well to these patterns. The practice of front-line workers, as we have described it, consists of a high level of one-on-one contact, a highly-focused view of what adults can do to help young people negotiate entry to the labor force, and a relatively informal and

flexible set of working relations with colleagues and supervisors. The local delivery structure is highly balkanized, which has the effect of creating multiple point of entry, but at the same time, it appears to involve a remarkably stable set of organizations which adapt readily to changes in policy.

>>The major deficiencies of the delivery structure are (a) its relative insensitivity to problems of equitable access to services; (b) its inability to account for anything like the total population of high-risk youth; and (c) its lack of incentives to adjust to major structural shifts in local labor markets.

The mode of analysis we've used in this study has been designed to address the question of how policy is implemented by reversing the usual process of looking first at policy objectives and then at law, regulations, and organization to see if they are consistent with those objectives. We have instead turned the process around and asked how one can get from an understanding of young peoples' school and work behavior, to an understanding of an appropriate delivery structure, and then to an understanding of how policy works on those things. In fact, the two modes of analysis go hand-in-hand, revealing complementary aspects of the process of implementation. Our major purpose here is to demonstrate that one can map backward from behavior to delivery-level practice and structure to policy, as well as forward from policy to practice to outcomes.

FOOTNOTES

[1] The research on which this paper is based is summarized in Richard F. Elmore and Betty Jane Narver, "Youth Employment Delivery Structures: Case Studies of Three Settings," Institute for Public Policy and Management, University of Washington.

[2] Under the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA), responsibility for local administration of federal employment programs was delegated to units of local government-- cities, counties, or consortia of local governments. These units were called "prime sponsors." In this paper, we will call them local government administrative agencies. These agencies actually engaged in very little direct delivery of services. They contracted for most employment services with other public or private agencies-- schools, community organizations, local government human service agencies, community colleges, etc. The exact mix of agencies and services varied considerably from setting-to-setting. This variation is what we attempted to represent by doing our research in three different sites.

Under the Joint Training Partnership Act, passed by the U.S. Congress in 1982 and scheduled to be implemented in the fall of 1983, the prime sponsor system, based on units of local government, has been replaced by a system based on joint business-government agencies at the local level and a stronger role for state government in designating and overseeing the operations of these local agencies. The Act also institutes stronger performance standards for employment programs and restricts uses of federal funds mainly to training.

[3] See Richard F. Elmore, "Backward Mapping: Implementation Research and Policy Decisions," Political Science Quarterly, Vol. 94, no. 4 (Winter 1979-80), 601-616. Also, Richard F. Elmore, "Forward and Backward Mapping: Reversible Logic in the Analysis of Public Policy," Graduate School of Public Affairs, University of Washington; and Michael Lipsky, "Standing the Study of Public Policy on Its Head," in Walter Burnham and Martha Weinberg, eds., American Politics and Public Policy (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1978).

[4] Handbook of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, 1980, Table 4.

[5] Stephen Seninger, "Postwar Trends in Youth Employment," in Arvil Adams and Garth Mangum, eds., The Lingering Crisis of Youth Unemployment (Kalamazoo, MI: Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, 1980).

[6] Handbook of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, 1980, Table 66.

[7] Ibid., Table 67; and Richard Freeman and David Wise, "The Youth Labor Market Problem: Its Nature, Causes, and Consequences," in Freeman and Wise, eds., The Youth Labor Market Problem (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

[8] Russell Rumberger, "Why Kids Drop Out of High School," Program Report #81-B4, Institute for Research on Educational Finance and Governance, School of Education, Stanford University.

[9] See, for example, From School to Work: Improving the Transition (Washington, D.C.: National Commission for Manpower Policy, 1976); and Wayne Stevenson, "The Transition from School to Work," in Adams and Mangum, eds., The Lingering Crisis of Youth Unemployment.

[10] In Norway, Sweden, and Denmark, the national government has experimented with programs designed to track young people after they leave secondary school and guarantee private or public sector jobs to those who are unemployed. The tracking is nearly universal and is done either by school personnel or local employment offices. It is made easier by the fact that Scandinavian countries use a single personal identification number for all transactions with the government-- something that would be highly unlikely in the U.S., especially for high-risk populations. See, Hakan Magnusson, "Youth Unemployment Policy in Sweden: Policy Change and Implementation Problems," paper presented to the International Working Group on Policy Implementation, June 1982; and Soren Winter, "Studying the Implementation of Top-Down Policy from the Bottom-Up: Implementation of Danish Youth Employment Policy," paper presented to the International Working Group on Policy Implementation, June 1982.